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Citation for published version:

Davison, A 2014, 'The End is Nigh: Music Postfaces and End Credit Sequences in Contemporary Television Serials', *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 195–215.
<https://doi.org/10.3828/msmi.2014.12>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.3828/msmi.2014.12](https://doi.org/10.3828/msmi.2014.12)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Music, Sound, and the Moving Image

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Title page

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Title	The End is Nigh: Music Postfaces and End Credit Sequences in Contemporary Television Serials
Abstract (100-200 words)	End credit sequences have received little scholarly attention, and yet since <i>The Sopranos</i> (1997–2006), at least, there has been a concerted effort on the part of certain shows’ producers to use this ‘space’ productively. Rather than the same theme returning at the end of each episode, a different audio track/song may be selected (or composed) for each one. Since <i>The Sopranos</i> other serials have followed suit: examples include <i>Mad Men</i> (2007–), <i>Boardwalk Empire</i> (2010–), and <i>True Blood</i> (2008–). Of course, popular songs have been heard during the end credit sequences of feature films, particularly since the 1980s, for reasons of cross promotion and economics. And certainly, on the one hand, the curation of popular songs (and other music tracks) over the end credit sequences of high production value television serials, particular to each episode, potentially signals a scale of budget for music rights that might be considered cinematic rather than televisual. But televisual seriality offers another reason why this approach is productive. Using <i>The Sopranos</i> as a case study, here I investigate the end credit sequence of contemporary television serials in the context of this seriality.
Five keywords	End credit sequence, music, postface, television, serial

The End is Nigh: Music Postfaces and End Credit Sequences in Contemporary Television Serials

A conflict has developed between how broadcasters regard a television show's end credit sequence and what producers and viewers expect from this time-space. While the latter may understand the end credit sequence to be part of the fabric of the television show, with the potential to contribute to viewer engagement and interpretation, British broadcasters have understood its status differently of late: as 'dead' space ripe for the (free) exploitation of promotional materials. For example, Britain's Channel 4 — a publicly-owned, commercially-funded public service broadcaster — requires that textual end credits be presented on the left half of the frame only, freeing the other half for trails and other promotional visuals, and the channel also retains control of the sequence's audio, since 'background audio may be dipped live on transmission to add voice-overs' (Channel 4 2013: 2). ITV — the UK's largest commercial network — requires the use of instrumental rather than vocal music here, 'in order to avoid a clash with any Presentation/Promotion activity being executed alongside the credit sequence' (ITV 2013 §4.6.1). The norm in policy terms in the current climate is for instrumental closing music of less than 30 seconds over which an unrelated voice-over announcement is presented. The reasoning for the strategy can be found on the commissioning pages of the BBC: 'Credits are important to programme-makers, but are usually of limited interest to our audience. The BBC's credit policy balances our desire to reflect significant creative contributions with the reality that lengthy credits make viewers switch over or switch off'.¹

¹ They continue: 'Research shows up to 80% of viewers can leave a programme at the start of the end credits'. Unfortunately those outside the BBC are not able to access this research.

If the responses of thousands of participants to a large-scale survey about end credit sequences carried out by the actors' union, Equity, in 2011 are representative, however, the reality is rather more complex.

The survey — 'Credit Where It's Due: What Viewers Think About TV Credits' — forms part of Equity's campaign to improve the legibility of credits, and seeks to halt British broadcasting's practice of squeezing credits. End credit music was not mentioned in any of the 2011 survey questions, yet vast numbers of respondents drew attention to the importance they place on this music and expressed anger and frustration with the practices mentioned above, particularly the intrusion of a prominent voice-over announcement that fails to take any account of the context of the close of the preceding show.² The following responses are representative of many others submitted. For many of these respondents the end credit sequence forms part of the show: 'Credits with their music and images are often still a part of the programme and part of the whole experience. it's the like cuddle after a good shag' (Equity 2012: 252). Interrupting it means losing the opportunity for a moment of reflection: 'I ALWAYS like the option to watch the credits uninterrupted. Often after films the music and the credits are gentle reentry to the real world' (ibid 184; original emphasis). It 'ruins' the end of the programme, 'killing' or 'shattering' the mood that has been created: 'Beautiful, atmospheric music and credits destroyed by voice-over advertising for next programme. Too many times to count!' (ibid 21). For a significant portion of these viewers, at least, the time-space of the end credit sequence on television involves a significant affective and reflective moment in which music plays a vital role.

² Equity reference the soapbox complaints of British comedian David Mitchell to support their view:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTIIRMgzLSI> (accessed 14 March 2014).

Gerard Genette's exploration of paratexts in relation to books as material objects assists in explaining the character of this conflict. Whereas for broadcasters these sequences occupy a liminal 'edge' space that leads to the 'next thing', for producers and viewers the sequence forms part of the show itself — an epilogue (Genette 1997: 1–2). Genette classifies such epilogues as a category of preface that he calls the 'postface'. Where prefaces precede the core text and may prime readers, a postface is placed and usually read after the core text. It enables a type of engagement not available to the reader at the point of entry: it assumes a shared experience or knowledge of the core text; as Genette puts it, 'now you know as much about it as I, so let's have a chat' (ibid 237). In literary terms, postfaces are rare. While the placement and type of discourse involved in a postface is 'logical and [...] relevant' to its reader, it is less effective for the author, 'for it can no longer perform the two main types of function we have found the preface to have: holding the reader's interest and guiding him by explaining why and how he should read the text' (ibid 238). For Genette, the postface 'is always both too early and too late', and 'can hope to fulfil only a curative, or corrective, function' (ibid 239). Genette is not concerned with texts issued in serialized form, however, nor with audiovisual formats such as television. I shall return to his view of the postface to show how its function is considerably more than merely 'curative'.

In this article I introduce the notion of the music postface, which has emerged as a significant formal element in contemporary high production value television serial dramas. In particular I focus on the recent practice of selecting novel pre-existent recorded music tracks for the end credit sequence of each episode of a serial, the opportunities that it affords producers and viewers, and explore possible reasons for its emergence. Isolated examples of the practice can be traced back to the cinema:

to the presentation of Simon and Garfunkel's 'The Sounds of Silence' at the end of *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), and Gene Kelly 'Singin' in the Rain' over the end credits of *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971). But it is in the recent abundance of series-serials that it has established itself most productively.

The practice originated with *The Sopranos*, commissioned by the premium subscription TV channel HBO (Home Box Office), which ran for six seasons over an eight-year period (1999–2007). While there are certainly interesting antecedents of the television serial postface that utilise music, to my knowledge none have turned more or less exclusively to pre-existent recorded music for this purpose. The approach was clearly judged to be successful, since it was much imitated through the 2000s, particularly in the case of other high production value HBO serials, such as *Six Feet Under* (2001–2005) and *True Blood* (2008–2014), as well as flagship shows produced by/for other channels, such as AMC's *Mad Men* (2007–2015). I begin by introducing the context in which the strategy emerged on television, and illustrate the practice with examples from *The Sopranos*. I follow this with some theoretical considerations, which will allow me to modify Genette's views on the postface. In the final section, I show how the postface has evolved since *The Sopranos* by drawing upon examples from AMC's *Mad Men* and HBO's *The Wire* (2002–2008).

***The Sopranos'* End Credit Sequences: Saying Things with Songs**

The original plan for *The Sopranos* was to open each episode with a different music track, but the producers were dissuaded from this by HBO. The channel's view in 1999 was that viewers needed to be alerted that the show was starting and that a familiar main title theme offered an important means of drawing viewers' attention (back) to the screen. The production team settled on an edit of 'Woke Up This

Morning (Got Myself a Gun)’ by Alabama 3 (A3 in the US) for the main title. The idea of using novel tracks for each episode re-materialised in the show’s end credit sequences.

David Chase (the show’s creator), Martin Bruestle (producer), and Kathryn Dayak (music editor) together selected the tracks for these sequences. Musician Stevie van Zandt, who played the part of Silvio Dante in the show, also contributed on occasion. Dayak had collaborated with Chase and Bruestle previously (on *Northern Exposure* [CBS, 1990–1995], for example), but *The Sopranos* was the first show she worked on as music editor with no composer (Droney 2001). The decision to use pre-existent recorded music rather than an original score was influenced in part by the success with which Martin Scorsese and Stanley Kubrick used it in their films, which, according to Chase, ‘blew my mind’ (*Music of the Sopranos* 2007). Dayak comments: ‘David, Martin and I all feel that underscore, as you usually see it in films and TV, can be a little over-the-top and manipulative. As in “Here’s a cue that’s sad, so we’d like for you to feel sad”. Sometimes there’s much more impact in not trying to tell people how to feel’ (Dayak in Droney 2001: §2).³ For Chase, Bruestle and Dayak, pre-existent recordings of (primarily) pop music accomplish this better than original scoring.

The decision to provide curated music selections during the show’s end credit sequences works against the notion of familiarity offered by a theme that returns at the end of each episode. Inserting a novel pre-existing music postface shifts the focus from the general (the serial as repeated experience) to the particular (the preceding episode). It can function as a provocation to the viewer: What is the music? Who is

³ Elsewhere Bruestle emphasises that Chase ‘didn’t want to tell the audience how to feel’ (in Alevi 2007).

performing it? How does it relate to what I've just experienced? In the following paragraphs I respond to this encouragement to hermeneutic enterprise, and describe some of the different ways in which the music postfaces for the first season of *The Sopranos* may be understood to operate, while recognising that these are not the only interpretations on offer. Table 1 lists the end credit music for each episode.

[INSERT Table 1]

The Episodes

At the end of the pilot episode, after the family and visitors have entered the house to eat, the camera pans across the garden and halts — for longer than it needs to — at the empty swimming pool (from which the family of ducks have now flown).⁴ The image fades to black, and the voice of Nick Lowe enters, singing 'The Beast in Me', a song he apparently wrote for his father-in-law, Johnny Cash. It is a beautifully restrained yet lyrical performance with a simple guitar accompaniment, and concerns the singer's/protagonist's recognition that he is unable to control himself.⁵ Viewers have just been introduced to the serial's protagonist, Tony Soprano, who is seeking the help of a psychiatrist to deal with repeated panic attacks. A family man with a sentimental side, he is also a high-ranking member of the New Jersey mafia, and is thus dangerous and violent. Lowe's somewhat peaceful performance of the song hints at the kind of ambivalent relationship that viewers develop with Tony through the

⁴ See Vermeulen and Rustad 2013 on the 'late cut' in *Mad Men*.

⁵ Each version ends with the plea 'God help the beast in me'.

course of the serial.⁶ There's a suggestion that there are hidden depths to Tony, and that in his seeking help he may be 'improved', but disgust or horror is also acknowledged. Through the intimacy of the performance we are primed to attend to Lowe's poetic words and understand them to speak for Tony: viewers are encouraged to feel sympathy for the protagonist.

The scenario at the end of Episode 2 ('46 Long') could not be more different. Tony's therapist has explained that until he accepts the anger he feels towards his mother he will continue to displace it and thus suffer the consequences. In the final scene, a bartender at the pole-dancing club, the Bada Bing, fails (once more) to navigate a recorded menu of telephone switchboard options. Tony displaces his anger onto his employee, hitting him furiously and persistently about the head with the telephone, until he falls to the floor semi-conscious. Behind the action in the foreground of the shot, topless women perform 'exotic dances' on the club's dance floor throughout. The aggressive music — 'Battle Flag' by the Lo-Fidelity All Stars — appears to be source music in the club, and continues, unflinching, as the attack occurs. The aggressive, violent performance of the track shares some valence with Tony's attack on his employee, and the dancers arrest their performance, momentarily. But then, slowly, they pick up where they left off. The closing static shot is here too held rather longer than there is need for narratively. It serves to underline the dancers' apathy, their commodified status, and/or perhaps their survival instincts. The song continues over the fade to black and throughout the text credits. Despite its apparent correspondence with Tony's aggressive attack, in lacking a response to his violence the continuation of the music selection emphasises alienation

⁶ Chase states that 'the brooding Johnny Cash version [...] would have been too portentous for a fledgling show' (Martin 2007: 166).

rather than identification, or, an empathy in Michel Chion's terminology. With the track's extended play out through the end credits the viewer has ample opportunity to reflect on their developing relationship with Tony, and not entirely positively.

The final moments of Episode 3 ('Denial, Anger, Acceptance') involve cross-cutting between several scenes: the threatened shooting of Tony's nephew, Christopher, the cold-blooded killing of Christopher's colleague Brendan, and Tony and Carmela Soprano in the audience at their daughter Meadow's school choir concert. The choral arrangement of the seasonal 'All Through the Night', in which Meadow takes a solo, underscores the sequence and closes the episode's action. The lyrics (by Boulton) urge a child to sleep, reassuring them that vigil will be kept over them, and that God will send guardian angels to protect them. The lyrics support the saving of Christopher, but Brendan is not so lucky (he is not a blood relation). The depiction of violence is significantly at odds with the teenagers' soothing performance of choral music. At the fade to black, 'Complicated Shadows' by Elvis Costello and the Attractions enters. It is an atmospheric track with an occasionally slippery melody in which the lyrics are foregrounded: they begin only after the action ends, and are to be listened to:

Well you know your time has come and you're sorry for what you've done

You should've never have been playing with a gun

In those Complicated Shadows

Well there's a line that you must tow

And it'll soon be time to go

But it's darker than you know in those Complicated Shadows

All you gangsters and rude clowns

Who were shooting up the town

When you should have found someone to put the blame on
Though the fury's hot and hard
I still see that cold graveyard
There's a solitary stone that's got your name on⁷

They may be understood to inform Chris's predicament as he tries to climb to a position of power within Tony's outfit.

In Episode 5 ('Meadowlands') the end credit music features the return of source music presented earlier in the episode. The track 'Gold Leaves' by composer-producer and cellist Michael Hoppé is first heard as instrumental background music at a restaurant at which Tony and Meadow eat dinner together as he drives his daughter to college interviews. The episode ends as Carmela makes clear to her husband that she now knows that his therapist is a woman, which he had not mentioned previously. Given the matter-of-fact presentation of Tony's extra-marital activities through the preceding episodes, and the raised eyebrows Carmela presents along with a sarcastic tone of voice, viewers are encouraged to assume that she now believes seeking therapy is simply a cover story for yet another affair. 'Gold Leaves' enters prominently as the image fades to black. With its earnest sentimental character, the track takes on an ironic tone in this context, in part due to our knowledge that on this occasion Carmela's suspicions are incorrect. The fact that Tony has settled an old score by strangling to death a previous associate while on the college trip adds to the conflict between the performed mood of the music and the violence witnessed. Arguably, the track introduces the notion of taste cultures, with Carmela associated with light classical music as the serial progresses (particularly through the use of

⁷ <http://www.elviscostello.com/#/words>

Andrea Bocelli's signature song 'Con Te Partirò').⁸ Here the sincere performance of 'Gold Leaves' underlines the artifice of Carmela's life as mafia wife.

Episode 6 ('Pax Soprana') features another extended sequence of cross cutting in its final scene, but here the track continues through to the end of the end credit sequence, and by contrast with episode two the track is not sourced within the story world. The sequence is intense, self-conscious, and features dynamic editing, which, along with the chosen hip-hop track, helps to indicate that the show's narrative arc has reached an important, though unexpected juncture. The final moments are crucial to the development of the plot, and by extending the music track through the sequence into the end credits ample time is given for the viewer to reflect on the seriousness of the new situation. Having been more or less absent through previous episodes, the sudden appearance of the FBI underlines the stealth (and thus success) of their surveillance operation, and also catapults them to the forefront of the plot. The track, an instrumental version of 'Paparazzi' by Xzibit, features samples from Gabriel Fauré's 'Pavane (Vocalise)' synthesised with a hip-hop beat.⁹ The track begins with the sampled sound of camera shutter releases, emphasising the track's title (Paparazzi) as we see a close-up of a waiter serving the group of mafia Capos. A female voice intones the melody of the Pavane wordlessly. We see in the pocket of the waiter (under his name badge, John), a small disc. As the beat kicks in, cross cutting moves the viewer from the restaurant to a room in which the FBI are building a case against the Capos, supplemented by black and white still images apparently taken by 'John'

⁸ 'Con Te Partirò' is heard during 'Commendatori' (Season 2 episode 4) and again over the first part of the episode's end credit sequence. It returns during 'Bust Out' (Season 2 episode 10) and 'The Telltale Moozadell' (Season 3 episode 9).

⁹ The sample is from a performance by Barbra Streisand from the 1976 album *Classical Barbra* (with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra under Claus Ogerman).

during the dinner. The editing of the images to the beat elides the fact that the two scenes take place at different points in time as well as space. The inclusion of the 'classical' adds weight and melancholy to the sequence, while the precision of the audiovisual editing promotes the FBI as functioning at a high level of competence, whereas the Capos have no knowledge of the surveillance: the FBI appear to author or control the sequence. The absence of Xzibit's rap leaves the centre of the song's sound world somewhat empty, but this is filled by the continuation of diegetic sound from both locations until the fade to black. The sophistication of the sequence's audio-visuality works in synergy with the narrative import of the knowledge to which viewers are here given access, emphasises the moment as climactic, and adds dynamic shape to the viewer's experience of the season as a whole. That the good times may be over is first presented clearly at this point.

The music for the end of Episode 12 ('Isabella') begins over the final frames of action: Tony closes his mobile phone having just told his therapist that he is feeling good, but that he'll 'feel better' when he finds out who tried to kill him. The (bungled) assassination attempt depicted in the episode has jolted Tony from his depression. As he finishes speaking the vocal accompaniment figure and regular percussive beat ('bom, bom, bom') that introduces Cream's 'I Feel Free' enters. The fade to black is synchronised with the entry of the hummed melodic line. Impetus is added as the introductory section is propelled towards the downbeat that signals the start of the chorus by the drum and guitar anacrusis. The direct connection between the episode's final dialogue and a music track that enters alongside it functions in several ways, principally musically (in terms of an energising rhythm and groove that builds gradually through two introductory phases), lyrically (Tony feels free... of depression), and via a correlation between the music and Tony's re-energised

engagement with the world. The sequence signals the season's second climax in terms of end credit music.

The end of the season's final episode ('I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano'), by contrast, is intimate and low key; it focuses on a family dinner, and closes with Bruce Springsteen's 'State Trooper'. Sonically the track also conveys low-level tension, however, by means of the regular, repeated, reverberant electric bass 'chug' at the start. Springsteen's voice is quiet and processed by the addition of significant reverberation, but clearly begins with the words 'New Jersey Turnpike' — words presented visually during the longest shot in the serial's (unchanging) main title sequence — and the song continues with a brief description of the locale that resonates with the imagery depicted in the opening sequence.¹⁰ The singer pleads for the state trooper not to stop him. He can live with what he has done. There are clearly semantic correspondences here — in terms of the geographical markers, and the declamation to the state trooper not to stop the song's protagonist, for example — and while the lyrics remain relatively open to interpretation, viewers are invited to explore the track's meaningfulness in the knowledge that 'State Trooper' has been specially selected for the end of the show's first season. In this context, the song might be understood to speak for Tony, his survival, and perhaps also his potential to take over as boss.

As these examples from the show's first season illustrate, music postfaces can operate at a variety of levels, and may do so simultaneously. Formally, they indicate the end of an episode. Sometimes the tracks provide continuity, as when their placement smooths the transition from closing action into the textual credits, or when

¹⁰ In this way the song can also bring the viewer full circle by reminding them of the show's main title sequence.

the selection has been heard as source music previously. They may punctuate or emphasise particular lines of dialogue, or form a contrast with the previous music track or immediately preceding action. Simon Frith's comments on the work that closing theme songs can accomplish in movies are also pertinent here: such songs may act as a summary of the episode, capture the mood of the episode's ending. They also 'have a built-in sense of sadness or *nostalgia*: the film [or episode] is over, we have to withdraw from its experience, get "back to reality"' (Frith 1984: 78; Frith's emphasis). Of course, with *The Sopranos* or any other television serial, any sadness that may be experienced in recognising that the music postface indicates a return to the real world is also tempered by the show's serial temporality; another episode will follow in due course.

Chase and Bruestle acknowledge that lyrics are most often 'centre stage' in the show's music postfaces, but state they avoid 'on the nose' correspondences (Alevi 2007). While they are keen to avoid directing interpretation to the point that their music selections are 'manipulative', or dogmatic in terms of meaning, the careful curating of these tracks and their placement (at both micro and macro levels) is clearly intended to encourage interpretive activity on the part of viewers. Indeed, focus group research with regular viewers of long-running serials suggests that the show has been successful in generating such activity.¹¹ Several participants stated that they enjoyed the curated character of the end credits music in *The Sopranos*: the approach reminded them of, or urged them to listen to, good music tracks,¹² and they used the

¹¹ A summary of my analysis of the focus group discussions concerned with end credit music can be accessed here: <http://hdl.handle.net/10283/625>.

¹² As one participant put it: 'But I quite often really, like for me, because of the music they pick, that was, as much a part of the programme as the rest of it, the bit of the action with the drama with the

music selections to enable a moment of reflection on the preceding episode. Some participants highlighted the use of different types of association between the song/track and the given episode, with one stating that they noted an assortment of music-episode correlations in *The Sopranos*, suggesting they listen to the show's end credit music intently, exploring possible connections to the preceding episode — a view echoed by participants from other groups.¹³

In *Hearing Film* Anahid Kassabian suggests that the use of pre-existent pop songs increases interpretive possibilities by 'opening perception onto perceivers own (socially conditioned) histories' (Kassabian 2001: 113), whereas late Romantic classical scoring in contemporary Hollywood films usually functions to narrow interpretive choices by limiting the range of subject-positions viewers are invited to occupy or identify with. Kassabian suggests that where contemporary films challenge the more conservative views of genre, sexuality and race represented in the classical Hollywood film of the studio era, for example, the shift may be driven by a need to do something different musically, since 'the possibilities for female characters in classical Hollywood scoring are severely limited ... a fallen woman or a virtuous wife' (ibid 70). Jeff Smith implies something similar when he notes that, in films of the New Hollywood generation, song lyrics were used to voice the 'feelings and attitudes' of their ambivalent protagonists. Pop was thus used to 'clarify particularly murky or uncertain aspects of character' and make such features 'more legible'. As a

actors, which is why I, and also usually 'cos they're quite good tunes. They're quite good to listen to' (10 February 2012).

¹³ For example, the 'quite featured use of pre-existing music, some of which has quite an explicit connection to the, er theme, and sometimes it feels a bit more... arbitrary ... there's a less obvious thing (23 February 2012).

result the approach thus also emphasised ‘authorial expressivity and more self-conscious narration’ (Smith 2001: 170).

Complex Storytelling: The Need for Music Postfaces

The emergence of the novel recorded music postface or epilogue is a significant component of contemporary serialized television, and it offers particular opportunities to serial creators and to viewers. The strategy makes ‘complex’ a formal element that, historically, has tended to remain unchanged once established. Exceptions to the latter situation tend to prove the rule rather than flout it, as is the case with episodes of the long-running BBC1 soap opera *Eastenders* (1985-) for example. Here occasional use is made of altered arrangements of the show’s closing music, but always to indicate or confirm an episode’s distinction.¹⁴ Such music is heard as notable only when the familiarity of the end credit music has been established firmly. The ‘habitual and ritualistic consumption of a series’ responds to the ‘material reception contexts of television broadcasting’ (Mittell 2012–2013, ‘Complexity in Context’ §16–17), and for this reason Jason Mittell emphasises the importance of the opening and closing segments of serials. They embody the boundaries around the show’s screen time, on one hand, and the viewer’s enforced time away from the serial, on the other, in what Mittell labels serial temporality.

The novel music postface can usefully be conceptualised as an expressive element in the development of what Mittell describes as *Complex TV*, ‘a new model of storytelling’ developed in the mid-1990s which is ‘predicated on specific facets of

¹⁴ When longstanding character Pat Butcher died, for example, a reverberant solo piano arrangement of the usual theme was used to close the episode (‘Pat’s Theme’ by Simon May, *Eastenders*. Dir. Jennie Darnell. BBC, UK, 19.00, 1/1/2012. BBC 1. 68 minutes).

storytelling that seem uniquely suited to the series structure’ of television (ibid §3).¹⁵ Here, narrative complexity involves shifting the balance between serial narration and episodic forms to a situation that understands the serial as ‘a cumulative narrative that builds over time, rather than resetting back to a steady-state equilibrium at the end of every episode’ (ibid §5).¹⁶ Within this framework serials handle this dialectical relationship differently: some are more episodic than others. In the case of *The Sopranos*, the show exemplifies ‘the model of serially-infused episodic television [...], with fairly episodic plots building into a serialized storyworld and characters [sic] arcs’ (ibid §19).

Mittell draws attention to the ‘operational aesthetic’ of complex television storytelling, which redefines ‘the boundary between episodic and serial forms, with a heightened degree of self-consciousness in storytelling mechanics, and demanding intensified viewer engagement focused on both diegetic pleasures and formal awareness’ (ibid §53).¹⁷ He suggests that narratively complex serials ‘often challenge the ease with which a casual viewer might make sense of a program, inviting temporary disorientation and confusion, allowing viewers to build up their comprehension skills through long-term viewing and active engagement’ (ibid ‘Orienting Paratexts’ §2). Such programmes have the capacity to function as ‘drillable’ texts, which can incite a ‘mode of forensic fandom that encourages viewers to dig-deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling’ (ibid §69); they ‘convert many viewers into amateur narratologists’ (ibid ‘

¹⁵ For Mittell these ‘built upon numerous innovators from the 1970s forward’ (ibid §5). See also the section ‘History’.

¹⁶ Trisha Dunleavy’s discussion of the serial-series is also relevant here (Dunleavy 2009).

¹⁷ See also Dunleavy 2009: 132–163.

Complexity in Context’ §51). The digital era makes it easy to share (or ‘spread’, in Mittell’s terminology) such drilled knowledge.

Mathew Weiner, a writer and producer on *The Sopranos* who went on to create *Mad Men*, posits that *The Sopranos* opened up a world of ambiguity to TV writers, with ‘plot points, characters and relationships [left] unstated’ (in *ibid* ‘Comprehension’ §2). When asked why he thinks people wanted to watch the show, Chase said it was because ‘they really didn’t know what was going to happen next, and they *worried* about what was going to happen next. And they never really knew’ (Chase 2008-2009, part 6, 30 minutes in; original emphasis as spoken). Introducing and regularising the practice of the novel recorded music postface — i.e. offering idiosyncratic content ripe for interpretation alongside a degree of familiarity in approach — encapsulates this aspect of the show at the formal level of the end credit sequence. Furthermore, the tracks chosen for these sequences were not identified within the textual credits when the show first aired: interested viewers had to work to produce meaningful interpretations of the curated music choices. Their knowledge and analyses were shared via *Sopranos* web forums, wikis and blogs, and thus functioned as drillable, spreadable texts.¹⁸

Regularising the practice of novel music postfaces means that producers can also use it to emphasise particular episodes via the ‘markedness’ of the track’s selection and presentation, or, very occasionally, by using an alternative to a music

¹⁸ Two official CD releases followed, and included many of the tracks used in these sequences. More recently a Spotify playlist of the all tracks appeared in the order they appear in the series, and the official HBO website for the show also now includes a section detailing the music choices for each episode: <http://www.hbo.com/the-sopranos#/the-sopranos/episodes/index.html> (accessed 12 December 2013).

postface.¹⁹ In this way the novel music postface functions as a formal element that may be modulated to express a dynamic across the season (or serial) as a whole, as I suggested occurs with episodes six and twelve of season one of *The Sopranos*, for example. So might the emergence of novel music postfaces be understood as a necessary adaptation that enables ‘complex TV’, and particularly ‘series-serials’, to achieve aesthetic balance — i.e. of continuity and discontinuity, teleology and ambivalence — at the level of the episode as well as the season, and arguably the serial as a whole.

In *Television Drama*, Dunleavy presents the historical evolution of these series-serials (2009: 139–163). She also notes that in the case of HBO and other premium subscription services, the ‘system of monthly accountability to subscribers appears to have favoured serialised over episodic drama narratives’ (ibid 157). The introduction of the novel music postface embodies a type of experimentation that is potentially flattering to the (affluent, college-educated) demographic of a significant proportion of the HBO/premium subscription television audience, yet is not so radical that it undermines the commercial aesthetic of such shows (which might result in a fall in subscriptions). A novel music postface has the potential to enrich viewer interpretation by intensifying, or conflicting with, the moral ambivalence or ethical confusion such serials present via their complex storytelling.

¹⁹ There are just two exceptions to the presentation of a music postface in *The Sopranos*’s 86 episodes: ‘Full Metal Jacket’ (season 2 episode 8), which features the repetitive electronic sound of hospital equipment as it monitors a character in critical condition, and the last episode in the show’s final season which plays out in silence.

Thus I propose a revision to Genette's peremptory dismissal of the (literary) postface, first by expanding his use of the term to include audiovisual serials, and second, by returning to his description of the postface as an invitation to converse with the [book's] author: 'Now you know as much about it as I, so let's have a chat' (Genette 1997: 237). This is precisely the activity that the novel music postface encourages in regular viewers of these series-serials. Since *The Sopranos*, the practice has been emulated by other high production value US serials. In this final section I provide further evidence to support the idea that some narratively complex TV serials require or demand these postfaces for aesthetic balance by comparing the approach of two of the most notable imitators of the practice: AMC's *Mad Men* and HBO's *The Wire*.

After *The Sopranos*: The Evolution of the Music Postface

As a basic cable channel AMC is supported by both subscriptions and advertising revenue generated from the commercial breaks that interrupt shows aired on the channel.²⁰ The serial follows the work and home lives of the owners and employees of Sterling Cooper, an advertising agency located on New York's Madison Avenue, but is centred on Don Draper, the Head Creative Executive. The show was originally set in the 1960s and the producers have taken great pains to ensure historical accuracy in terms of setting, costumes, historical events, and the expression of cultural ideas. The same is (usually) true of the recorded music tracks selected to close each episode.²¹ In his study of the use of music and sound in *Mad Men*, Tim J. Anderson draws attention

²⁰ Rebecca Greenfield (2012) argues that the economics of *Mad Men* are less focused on advertising and more on overseas and DVD sales of the show, however.

²¹ See Charlie Wells (2012) for a discussion of exceptions to historical accuracy in its music selections.

to the form of authentic re-enactment that audio recordings make possible:

Unlike every other element, there is an assumption that a recording cannot be as easily manufactured as a clothing pattern or furniture design. [...] The temporal contingencies that mold any original recording's textures are simply too ephemeral to be effectively restaged. Thus, the tones of disenchantment that cut through [...] *Mad Men* provide America's Camelot with a particularly uncanny effect because they originate from a specific narrative world where their sources derive 'from popular music of the time, and more specifically music that the characters in this show would know' (quoted in Johans). (Anderson 2011: 79; he is citing Johans 2008).

In using historical recordings our view of this mythicised past appears to be questioned or critiqued from within the period itself. Even when end credit tracks are selected which are complementary in mood to the preceding episode, particularly in terms of their lyrics, 'the recording brings with it a tone that provides one final critical dimension to the episode: *Punctus contra punctum*: [sic] the structure to shake out nascent meaning and allowing them to come to fruition' (ibid 80-81).

The very first episode offers a typical example. Early on a character mentions in passing the Lerner and Loewe stage musical *My Fair Lady*, which ran continuously on Broadway from 1956 to 1962. The music postface selected is a version of the show's 'On the Street Where You Live', an effusive expression of Freddy Eynsford-Hill's infatuation with Eliza Doolittle, here sung by Vic Damone with swoopy sentimental string accompaniment (the recording was a top ten hit for Damone in the US in 1956). Its placement here is rather jarring, however. Prior to this moment Don has been depicted as a creature of Madison Avenue, witty, adulterous with (yet also by turns somewhat respectful of) women and successful at his work. It is a full forty five minutes into this forty eight minute episode before we see him travel to his suburban home in upstate New York to his wife (Betty) and two children, asleep in

bed.²² He strokes his children's hair as they sleep (0.47.00): apparently a picture of domestic bliss. Yet we have just heard Betty say she thought Don might be staying in the city again for work (which we have seen involves an affair). Damone's emotional performance of the song cannot be taken at face value. Part of the critique here is engendered by the discrepancy between what Betty sees or knows, and the knowledge viewers have gleaned during the course of the episode.

Mad Men's novel pre-existent music postfaces are sometimes displaced by original cues by the show's composer, David Carbonara, however. This happens first in season one when a cue by Carbonara closes the episode '5G' (season 1 episode 5) in which the rug is figuratively pulled from beneath the viewer, as well as from beneath the feet of Don Draper. The show's central protagonist is not who we thought he was. For some reason — we know not yet why — he has assumed another identity. He rejects the real world stepbrother whom we have just seen was elated at having happened upon him. Betty's lack of knowledge about her husband becomes apparent as they lie in bed whispering about their summer plans. Carbonara's cue is enigmatic: quiet sustained pitches on strings, a slow sustained falling solo clarinet line, gently supported rhythmically by figures on tuned percussion instruments. In harmonic terms the cue is emphatically unresolved. At the most basic level, the distinctiveness of this musical epilogue, its difference from the pattern established previously, emphasises the narrative importance of the episode and encourages the viewer to reflect upon it.

²² These timings are from the DVD box-set. When originally transmitted on AMC, the show was interrupted by commercial breaks.

The same approach underlines the narrative significance of season one's episodes ten and twelve.²³

As with *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*'s creative team use music postfaces to articulate the dialectical relationship between single episodes and the season (or serial) as a whole. But here they also invert the practice: narrative climaxes are underlined by replacing novel 1960s recordings of pre-existent music tracks with a suite of related original cues. These sequences demonstrate that by the time that the first season of *Mad Men* was produced in 2007, the novel music postface had become an expected convention. In this situation, confounding the expectation may offer greater rewards in terms of the intensity of meaning generated, and may also assist in creating a sense of hierarchy ('Listen! We're doing something different here.') The absence of a novel music postface in 'Babylon' (season 1 episode 6) endorses the diagnosis. An arrangement of Psalm 137 performed diegetically extends over a montage sequence that draws together images of several of the episode's characters. The musical performance ends as Roger and Joan leave their hotel room, separately, and wait, separately, for taxis outside the hotel, framed by a long static two-shot that emphasises the distance between them. There is no more music. After the fade to black, the noisy, unsentimental sound of the streetscape continues through the end credit sequence.

The Wire, another critically acclaimed HBO serial from the same period, offers an interesting contrast. Whereas Tony Soprano and his two 'families' were always at the centre of *The Sopranos*, each season of *The Wire* focuses on a different

²³ 'Long Weekend' (season 1 episode 10) closes with Don/Dick telling Rachel Menken about his childhood; 'Nixon vs. Kennedy' (season 1 episode 12) includes flashbacks to the Korean War, and shows the moment that Dick assumed Don's identity.

theme, and/or particular institution, with an extended ensemble cast that creates continuity across seasons and the show as a whole. The show's narrative organisation is focused rather more on the longitudinal interweaving of a relatively large number of strands, and much less on a sense of closure in individual episodes; or as Marsha Kinder argues, its primary structural unit is the city of Baltimore (Kinder 2008).

Mittell explains:

There are almost no stand-alone plotlines within any given episode. All of the show's narrative events are either independent moments illustrating characters but lacking larger arc importance [...] or contribute to the slow accumulation of the central plotlines that run throughout a given season. Individual episodes are defined less by their narrative events in terms of their plot revelations, but rather due to their notable tonal moments. (Mittell 2012–2013 'Complexity in Context' §20)

Of particular relevance here is that, as if in support of this analysis, the show eschews novel music postfaces at the level of the episode. An instrumental theme called 'The Fall' composed by the show's music supervisor, Blake Leyh, closes each one. Nonetheless, the novel recorded music postface continues to play an important role in *The Wire*, but here at the higher hierarchical level of season finale.

Immediately before the end of each season's final episode, a novel recorded pop track plays through an extended montage sequence.²⁴ These sequences function as season summaries: they capture roughly contemporaneous moments in the lives of the many ensemble characters. Most of these highlight the failure of attempts to change the characters' situations, however: a return to the status quo, which the return of 'The Fall' a moment or two later emphasises further. Although the music selections

²⁴ Each season's final episode is also 'packed with callbacks or payoffs to moments from throughout the season', as Alan Sepinwall highlights in relation to season 1, for example (Sepinwall 2008).

for these montage sequences may reflect the tone or mood of the situations depicted visually, the lyrics tend to have an oblique rather than a direct resonance with them, and thus maintain a relatively open response to interpretation. The show's creator, David Simon states that 'it brutalizes the visual in a way to have the lyrics dead on point. [...] Yet, at the same time, it can't be totally off point. It has to glance at what you're trying to say'.²⁵ This is exemplified by Jesse Winchester's performance of his own 'Step by Step', which, in terms of its lyrics, distinguishes between the innocent (the saints) in Heaven, and the singer/protagonist who may 'tarry awhile, 'cos I need to know, before I go, how come the devil smiles'. And the reason he does so is in part that 'Heaven's walls are too high to hear the trouble down below'. There is thus a more general theme here of distinguishing between those who choose to get their hands dirty in attempting to understand the 'the trouble below', and those who choose to look away. Occasionally the song's lyrics resonate more directly with the images on screen. For example, we see a character who started the season as a police detective now back patrolling the streets with a baton, as we hear, 'Jacob's golden ladder gets slippery at the top. Many a happy go lucky saint has made that long, long drop'. There is more general music thematic resonance here though, articulated by the repetitive rhythmic and textural figures, alongside a relatively unprocessed solo vocal: a lone voice speaks out, but nothing changes.

Beyond source music, the scarcity and placement of the show's recorded music selections adds to the 'markedness' of these sequences, and invites interpretive activity on the part of the viewer. The importance of the novel music postface to interpretation is perhaps demonstrated most emphatically by the choice of track for

²⁵ David Simon in his commentary to 'Mission Accomplished' (season 3 episode 11) on the DVD of *The Wire*, Complete Third Season. ASIN B000FTCLSU.

the fifth and final season's closing montage sequence: a music selection that is *not* in fact novel. The chosen track is the same cover of Tom Waits's 'Way Down in the Hole' by the Blind Boys of Alabama previously heard as the main title sequence of *The Wire*'s first season. This is a fact that should not be lost on regular viewers, since each subsequent season presented a different cover or version of the very same song.²⁶ According to *The Wire*, the more things change in Baltimore, the more they stay the same.

Mittell draws attention to the different 'structural logics' around which *The Wire* and *The Sopranos* are organised: '*The Wire* crafts season-long plotlines comprised of thematically and tonally connected episodes, while *The Sopranos* compiles more discrete episodic stories into larger thematically unified, but less plot-driven seasons' (Mittell 2012–2013, 'Complexity in Context' §20). In these serials, and in *Mad Men* too, the novel music postface answers a need generated by the complexity of each serial's approach to narrative closure, demonstrated by modulations of the dialectical relationship between episode and season. Their emergence in contemporary serial television can be compared productively with what Charles Burkhart identifies as the necessity for musical codas engendered in certain pieces of Western art music: where in the climax of the main body of a piece, a 'particularly effortful passage', is often created by 'working an idea through to its structural conclusions' and after the creation of all this momentum a coda is required

²⁶ The other artists who perform the song are Tom Waits (2), The Neville Brothers (3), DoMaJe (4) and Steve Earle (5). See Davison (2013) for a review of how members of the focus groups mentioned above described their response to the strategy. See also Peterson (2011) for a detailed critique of the main title song and its covers, and its insertion of black spirituality into the show, which is otherwise marginalised.

to ‘look back’ on the main body, allow listeners to ‘take it all in’, and ‘create a sense of balance’ (Burkhart 2005: 12).

More recently yet another strategy has emerged in relation to end credit sequence music: the composition of novel original music (or a novel arrangement) as postface. This happens throughout *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2007–2012) and through the second season of *House of Cards* (Netflix, released February 2014), for example. As with *The Sopranos*, both shows explore the impact of decisions and situations on a particular character and their immediate circle over time, but also draw on an ensemble cast. While there are certainly cumulative dynamics in play across the season as a whole, both shows balance their complexity at the level of the episode rather than of the season, unlike the systemic organisation that *The Wire* expressed through its approach to seriality. Both shows must also offer this balance in a quite different institutional and economic context; it is much cheaper to commission new music for each episode from the show’s composer than to license music for broadcast in perpetuity, for example. Using the same composer to create a unique music postface for each episode in a particular season, sometimes beyond, enables the generation of a more consistent sound world for the show. Indeed, in the case of *Breaking Bad*, this sometimes also extends to the immediate past, in the form of echoing the idiosyncratic sound world of the preceding episode. In season 3, Tio Salamanca’s dinging bell forms the basis of the music postface of ‘Caballo sin nombre’ (season 3 episode 2), and in ‘I See You’ (season 3 episode 8) it riffs on the sound of emergency medical equipment. Such approaches build on the opportunities first introduced by *The Sopranos*.

Equity’s campaign against squeezing end credits is beginning to gain ground. Following a further survey with its own customers, in November 2012 satellite

broadcaster Sky ‘implemented a new strategy onscreen that works for everyone’ (Laing 2013). Channel 4 and S4C have followed Sky’s lead, and the BBC has since ‘pledged’ to ensure that ‘at least one episode per series will feature the show’s credits in full’, and additionally will not intrude where productions make ‘special use of credits’ (BBC 2012). There may still be some way to go for producers and audiences alike to achieve an ideal viewing situation in cases where music postfaces form part of serial television broadcast in the UK. Yet it seems that at least some of these broadcasters are beginning to recognise that diminishing the aesthetic and reflective opportunities offered by the introduction of the novel music postface in serial television ultimately works against their channel’s branded attempts to encourage viewers to ‘stay-tuned’.²⁷

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²⁷ I would like to thank the editors of this special issue and the anonymous reviewer for all of their constructive comments on an earlier draft of the article. Simon Frith and Nick Reyland made a number of important suggestions. Thank you. Adarsh Peruvamba provided valuable assistance in producing a database of music use in *The Sopranos*. The essay also benefited from comments and questions raised by participants at the Music and Screen Media Conference, Liverpool. Thanks are due especially to those who participated in the focus groups in 2012. Of course, any errors are mine alone.

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